# The UN got it wrong. We're not just sad, we're happily so



**OF MAGIC** & MADNESS

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#### **BADIUZZAMAN BAY**

times, Bangladesh has found itself in the unenviable position of being one of the countries where people are the least happy. First, there was the Global Emotions Report 2022, released by the polling giant Gallup, which ranked Bangladesh as the seventh saddest nation in the world. Then last month, Bangladesh was ranked 118th out of 137 countries in the World Happiness Report 2023, a publication of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. The sudden flurry of international recognition demands scrutiny of what is otherwise still a non-issue in our policy circles: people's happiness.

Of course, measuring subjective ideas like happiness or sadness is a tricky business. It gets trickier when you try to measure an entire nation's "state of mind." But there is a growing consensus about how collective happiness, or lack thereof, should be measured. In the UN report, for example, countries were ranked based on people's life evaluations in six key factors: social support; GDP per capita; health; freedom; corruption; and generosity. Your level of satisfaction in each indicator adds up to a picture of how you are as a

I'm not going into details on why we have scored so poorly. Suffice to say, it was bound to happen. Just take a look around, soak in all the lunacy, agony and commotion that are around, and ask yourself: if you were to evaluate your lived experience in this climate, would you have rated

In two global rankings in recent differently? Doomed to a life of selfperpetuating crises - from indoor to outdoor, cultural to political, medical to environmental, academic to economic - people may naturally despair more.

But this last part is where I think the UN et al got it wrong. Today, despite the myriad crises in our life, or perhaps because of them, we are not just sad – we're quite happily and

Pardon the oxymoron, but think about it: if our cost-of-living crisis is really a product of a sweeping cost-of-profiteering crisis, where's the initiative to address it? If crimes and civil rights violations are so widespread, where's the sense of urgency to prevent them? If corruption is eating away all our economic gains, why are we doing nothing about it? If pollution has reached alarming levels, why is there no indication of

> In other words, if the state is responsible for creating the conditions that are making us sad or unhappy, our reaction to it as citizens is helping to perpetuate those conditions, making us equally complicit.



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

that alarm in our behaviour? If "state" of misery, you might as well try to damp. Nothing fresh hardly comes accept it, internalise it, and even have a laugh about it if possible, right? It's like an abusive relationship that you can't "just leave." You are no longer a passive spectator then; you are an active abettor in your own undoing. Happy to serve, happy to suffer. One side effect of a lengthy exposure

to so many unresolved crises is that it vitiates how we think or interact with each other. A good metaphor for a nation that fails to evolve would be a landlocked lake where water is stagnant, or a room without ventilation where the air becomes

out of it. Such an environment breeds confusion and cynicism. We start to distrust everyone. We forget to laugh. We hate jokes, or satire, or cartoons, lest we are tricked into happiness just for the sake of it. We dissect every move and every inspiration until – to quote Javier Bardem's character from Vicky Cristina Barcelona grain of charm is squeezed out of it." But we're happiest when we feel vindicated in our suspicion of others. We toy with the idea of change, but seek accommodation with the status

Just think: when was the last time you saw broad consensus on a nationally important issue, or united pushback against an injustice?

Social media is a perfect ground for such divisiveness. What joy is there in our newsfeeds is overshadowed by the organic outpouring of cynicism that comes through at every opportunity. What happened with Prothom Alo reporter Samsuzzaman Shams or thespian Mamunur Rashid in recent days are examples of how deeply distrusting of everything we are.

In a different reality, their report or comment would have started a healthy conversation about the poverty of the pocket and the poverty of the art, both of which are on full, unabashed display presently. Criticism, either of the government or of artistic practices, is a key requirement for change as it inspires pursuit of better outcomes. This is how civilisation has always progressed. But instead, our cynicism and paranoia again got the better of us. So Shams became a victim of the kind of disingenuous hair-splitting that follows every call for pro-people reform, and Rashid became a victim of the kind of vilification that follows every wannabe reformer.

A polarised nation is really a paralysed one. It moves without purpose, debates without honesty, and fights without conviction. Of course, some things are beyond the control of citizens, and here comes the responsibility of those in power. A government can ensure people's happiness by making the right decisions with regard to human rights, health, education, governance, living standards, etc. But to force the government's hand is the responsibility of the citizens.

Happiness, for a nation, is a matter of choice, just as sadness. If we don't strive for change, or hold our government accountable, or unite and see past our prejudices for the greater good, we are choosing a life of sadness for ourselves.

# Myanmar's hybrid democracy is no democracy at all



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## TASNEEM TAYEB

The recent announcement on this move should perhaps be seen as dissolving Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party does not come as a surprise, for the last course of its unravelling had been set in motion earlier in the year. The Political Party Registration Law – announced on January 26, 2023 - repealing a 2010 legislation, set multiple requirements and clauses that would make fresh registration for political parties almost impossible.

The new law disqualifies any individual with previous conviction from joining a political party. This by default disqualifies multiple members of the NLD senior leadership, including Suu Kyi herself and former president Win Myint, from playing a role in any capacity in the bigger political sphere of Myanmar. And for obvious reasons, NLD refused to register as per the new law, or even participate in an election under the military junta.

There are many other ludicrous logistical challenges in the new law that makes registration sustenance difficult for the majority of parties. For instance, under the new law, any national political party has to fund USD 47,000 to qualify for reregistration. In Kyat – Myanmar currency - it comes to 100 million, which for any small to medium scale political party is a huge sum. Also, any political party or group planning to nominate an electoral candidate must have at least 100,000 members within three months of reregistering a whopping rise from 1,000 members required under the previous law.

The international community is rightfully saying that the junta is using legal instruments to gain legitimacy in the political landscape through a staged, superficial election "process". But in the context of Myanmar's bloody and volatile political history with the military resorting to brutality and massacre to gain power on multiple occasions,

a fresh attempt by the junta to try and put on a civilised face.

Interestingly, the root of the recent headlong fall of Myanmar's democracy lies in the very reforms that the previous junta had initiated to try to transition to a hybrid power-sharing model of democracy. Unfortunately, military-drafted constitution that was passed through a 2008 referendum had been curated in such a way that only safeguarded the interests of the military. Article 17.b, for instance, enabled the military to hold the reins of three key ministries – Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Border Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs – literally making any future democratic government the Tatmadaw's hostage. Then Article 14 ensured that the Tatmadaw had 25 percent of the parliamentary seats in all parliaments, reserved for their appointees. Moreover, the Tatmadaw kept the power to veto over any constitutional change.

While the NLD and some other parties had initially rejected the constitution and refrained from taking part in the 2010 general elections, they did participate in the 2012 bi-elections and later the NLD won the 2015 general elections by a landslide. But even after winning with such overwhelming support, Suu Kyi, during her fragile tenure, did not - and perhaps could not do anything to change the power dynamics with the Tatmadaw.

What is even more unfortunate is that in trying to play along with the Tatmadaw, Suu Kyi failed to demonstrate even the basic moral compass, and her moral superiority as a democratically elected national leader was fully compromised when she provided tacit support to the Tatmadaw during their bloody genocide of the helpless Rohingva in 2017. Her silence on this burning issue exposed the moral corruption of the hybrid model democracy in

A CLOSER the country. Suu Kyi's complicity or failure only emboldened the military iunta, to the point where they felt that they no longer even needed the guise of democracy to rule.

repairing" is what we think we need,

why are we still so conflicted about it?

Lack of active citizenship is as much

to blame for a protracted crisis as the

lack of initiative from the government.

responsible for creating the conditions

that are making us sad or unhappy,

our reaction to it as citizens is helping

to perpetuate those conditions,

resigned to the inescapability of our

crises, allowing crisis fatigue to set

in. And if you must remain in a state

At a certain level, we seem to have

making us equally complicit.

In other words, if the state is

But why point the finger at Suu Kyi alone for the aggrandisement of the military? This has been in the making for over decades. The lack of synergy between the people of Myanmar has also been a key enabler of rising military power. While it is understandable that it is not possible for people from various ethnic backgrounds to fully coalesce into one single ethno-cultural identity, but acceptance of diversity, peaceful co-existence and shared national identity should have been common meeting points for all. But in Myanmar, the scenario has been different for a long time. Multiple civil wars since independence in 1948 have further deepened Myanmar's ethnic and religious fault lines, and enabled the military to unify against the divided civilians.

Also, the Buddhist-nationalist majority unfortunately took part in and provided moral support to the junta's suppression of the ethnic minorities. Case in point: the anti-Muslim hate speech of the Buddhist nationalists in the lead up to and during the 2017 attacks on the Rohingya only fuelled anti-Rohingya, anti-Muslim sentiments among the people and generated support for the junta's actions.

The recent political developments in Myanmar carry significance for regional stability. With the junta in power and engaged in frequent violent conflicts with armed resistance groups, the fear of further Rohingva exodus or internal tension spilling into the region, remain major headaches for the neighbours, especially India and Bangladesh. The recent escalation of tension along the Bangladesh-Myanmar border with shells falling inside Bangladesh territory has already added to the strained relationship between the two neighbours.

This has also put into question the issue of Rohingya repatriation. While the region should keep a close eye on the political developments in Myanmar, Bangladesh and the international community should weigh all aspects before repatriating the refugees and in dealing with Myanmar.



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### e-Tender Notice No : 42/2022-23 Tendering Method (LTM)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following Packages :

SI No	Description of Work & Package No.	Tender Last Selling (Date & Time)	Tender Closing (Date & Time)	Tender Opening (Date & Time)	Estimated Cost (Tk.) Remarks
01	Improvement of Bokapur Nalpukur Jame Mosque under- Mohadevpur Union [Latitude: 24.91193195, Longitude: 88.78292116], Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-87) (Tender ID- 791150)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 319152.00
02	Improvement of Sonakuri Graveyard under Hatur Union [Latitude: 24.95941892, Longitude: 88.67428523], Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-88) (Tender 1D-791151)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 309489.00
03	Improvement of Mohishbathan Bazar Jame Mosque under Hatur Union [Latitude: 24.95720151, Longitude: 88.72316824], Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon (Package No. GSID- 2/NAO/DW-89) (Tender 1D-791149)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 304345.00
04	Improvement of Ostogram Gaholi Baroari Durga Mondir under Hatur Union [Latitude: 24.97675227, Longitude: 88.68183239] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID- 2/NAO/DW-90) (Tender ID-791148)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 321430.00
05	Improvement of Raigaon Kanochkuri Jame Mosque under Raigaon Union [Latitude: 24.97380644, Longitude: 88.84603578] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID- 2/NAO/DW-91) (Tender ID- 791147)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 300175.00
06	Improvement of Shaharai Central Graveyard under Raigaon Union [Latitude: 25.00270799, Longitude: 88.80486123] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-92) (Tender ID- 791146)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 624255.00
07	Improvement of Khordonarayonpur Kumirpukur Jame Mosque under Vimpur Union [Latitude: 24.851622557, Longitude: 88.83458712] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-93) (Tender ID- 791145)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 300682.00
08	Improvement of Goaspara Mondir under Mohadevpur Union [Latitude: 24.919973, Longitude: 88.752203] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-94) (Tender ID-791144)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 493886.00
09	Improvement of Sarta Sarsan Bazar Jame Mosque under Mohadevpur Union [Latitude: 24.950662, Longitude: 88.817070] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID- 2/NAO/DW-95) (Tender ID- 791143)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	I,TM 661806.00
10	Improvement of Mohadevpur Central Mohila Jame Mosque under Mohadevpur Union [Latitude: 24.91869755, Longitude: 88.74743749] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-96) (Tender ID- 791142)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 393357.00
11	Improvement of Sarta Aulapara Jame Mosque under Mohadevpur Union [Latitude: 24.95650664, Longitude: 88.81764843] Upazila: Mohadevpur, District: Naogaon. (Package No. GSID-2/NAO/DW-97) (Tender ID-791141)	18-Apr-2023 17:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	19-Apr-2023 14:00	LTM 327930.00

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